

HAFTORAH OF SIDRA : שופטים

This week's Haftorah is taken from the Sefer Yeshayohu, from verse 12 of Chapter 51 till verse 12 of Chapter 52.

1. There is very little real connexion, if any, between the Sidra and its Haftorah — it is simply the fourth of the Seven Haftorahs of Comfort that follow Tisha b'Av. Like the other six, this Haftorah, too, comes from Sefer Yeshayohu and tells of the Novvi's vision into the future, when the People of Israel will return to their holy Land from their exile.
2. But for the present, he asks the Jewish People why should they be in such dread of the human wrecker (Yeshayohu prophetically refers here to Nevuchadnetzar, the King of Babylon, whose rampaging conquests brought destruction to so many peoples) when Nevuchadnetzar himself will be so spectacularly destroyed, together with his idols, when King Cyrus of Persia will eclipse the Babylonian Empire that it never rise again.
3. Yeshayohu proclaims that HaShem will comfort His People after their exile. But he wonders how come that the Jewish People forgets that it is Almighty G-d, HaShem, Who stretches out the heavens and establishes the earth, Who makes the raging sea with its multitude of waves — it is HaShem Who has called the Jewish People into existence and Who will always preserve them, even as He has to punish them for their waywardness. (But why won't they return to HaShem and His Torah and save themselves the punishment?)
4. It is true, says Yeshayoh in the name of HaShem, that the Jewish People will be made to suffer the cruelties and horrors of the exile because they deserted HaShem and His Torah: yes, it is true. He sees how they have indeed drunk the cup of misfortune and calamity to its very dregs. But the punishments that HaShem inflicts are to chastise, to train, to purify. They are never to destroy His People. And thus, says Yeshayoh, even if Babylon will serve as Hashem's rod of chastisement, the day of reckoning will come and Babylon, and all those who chose to be cruel to the Jewish People throughout the ages, will be punished for their cruelty.
5. In the same way as HaShem ended our Egyptian slavery, so too will he bring an end to our oppression by other tyrants that afflict us. The cup of His anger that we are made to drink will instead be put into the hands of those that have tormented HaShem's People and so will come to an end the shame of His People and their vilification through the ages and the desecration of HaShem's Name which is the consequence of His People's humiliation at the hands of their detractors.
6. Meantime, until that day arrives, the People of HaShem are to keep to their sacred task, to bring the heavens upon the world, to bring G-dliness into the lives of men. HaShem has placed His message of justice and righteousness in the mouth of His People Israel

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that they shall bring that message to all Mankind, to inspire with their righteousness all the Nations of the world. In the famous words of one of the more perceptive non-Jewish writers: "As long as the world lasts, all who want to make progress in righteousness will come to the Jewish People for inspiration, as the people who have the sense for righteousness most glowing and strongest." That is our task and our mission and the better kind of people readily appreciate the effect of the Jewish People upon the world. To paraphrase another non-Jew, "I believe that the Hebrews are the most glorious Nation that ever inhabited this Earth! The Jews have influenced the affairs of Mankind more, and more happily, than any other nation, ancient or modern!"

7. But for the Jewish People, this recognition comes at a heavy cost because there will always be others who resist G-dliness. Therefore, says Yeshayohu, HaShem will shelter and protect His People with His Own Hands, as it were, so that the Jewish People shall accomplish their mission and their purpose. And it is when they fulfil this, their sacred duty, that HaShem proclaims, "You are My People!"
8. Yeshayoh sees the herald of the final Redemption standing firmly in Yerushalaim proclaiming peace to all Mankind, announcing the good news of the salvation of the whole world as everyone acknowledges HaShem as the Sovereign of All.